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HISTORICAL EDIFICES OF RAMNA: A PROSPECTIVE HERITAGE ROUTE IN URBAN DHAKA

Abstract: For a city that started at the bank of a river, Dhaka shows a unique characteristic in its urban development pattern. The 400 years old city in its historical timeline shifted from the river towards the land giving preference to a certain area that is known as Ramna. The history of Ramna began in 1608 with the Mughal. It comprised two residential areas of the high officials of the Mughals. It once placed Mughal garden, green open spaces, garden houses etc. The British cleared the jungle of Ramna and built racecourse, boulevard for the elites to stroll in the evening. The planning of this area as the civil station of the newly formed province of East Bengal and Assam in 1905 saw construction of several edifices. It also witnessed the building of the first modern architecture by Architect Mazharul Islam of Bangladesh. A walk started from the mosque of Musa Khan tucked in between Curzon Hall and Shahidullah Hall towards the Institute of Fine Arts of Dhaka University would take us from Mughal to Modern Dhaka. The collections of buildings of Ramna from different historical phases tell the story of the past in a synchronized manner. The study reveals a diverse historical route of different timeline within the contemporary urban form of Dhaka. Hence, the objective of this paper is to explore how the embedded connectivity of a historical urban segment can be traced down with the help of space syntax analysis to define a unique heritage route for future planning of the city.

Keywords: historical edifices, Ramna, heritage route, urban Dhaka, space syntax.

Introduction: Urban Growth of Dhaka & Significance of Ramna

The 400 years old city Dhaka is centrally located, almost in the midmost segment of the country. The geographical location of Dhaka was always favored by the invaders, settlers from the very existence of the city. Dhaka in times was lost but again rose from its own ruins. The city enjoyed being the provincial capital of the Mughal and Colonial period. It experienced the adornment of being military, administrative and trading center in times. The first settlers set foot on its ground from boats. The forgotten fact is that, Dhaka is almost like an island framed by three rivers, Buriganga, Turag, and Balu. Even until 1950's, with its spacious green spaces, crisscrossing canals, boats plying through the heart of the city, Dhaka promised to be a place by the water. (Mamun, 2000). The urban development history of Dhaka shows two major reasons for its growth pattern: the administrative decisions of the rulers and the economic factor (Islam, 1996). The Mughal city concentrated along the river Buriganga. They choose the site for defense strategy. The colonial Dhaka stretched more towards north. The introduction of steam engine, railway for commerce and transportation of raw materials (i.e. jute, tea etc.) benefited the inhabitants' direct & indirect way and also initiated urban development to the city. After the creation of the independent state of Bangladesh in 1971 Dhaka became the capital of a sovereign country. This led to Dhaka's phenomenal growth since then (Fig.1).

Here, in this study the area Ramna and the architectural edifices within it were chosen for the following reasons; firstly, the planning of Ramna as the civil line of Bengal province reflects the concept of Colonial Township. Secondly, Ramna, act as a breathing space for the city since the

Mughal. Mughal garden, “Bag e Padshahi” (Garden of Emperors) was in this area. The Nawabs garden house, zoo was also in Ramna. The British built racecourse, boulevards for the elites (Mamun, 2000). The first urban landscape planning of Dhaka initiated planting trees in Ramna. Still today, Ramna is vibrant with cultural activities taking place within and around it. Finally and most importantly, the change in land use pattern from residential to administrative enclave to institutional zone, the area did not face drastic changes in terms of diminishing its authenticity as a royal landmark. Rather it evolved with the city keeping its innate age old vibe refreshing with modern ramifications. Part of it even now considered as the vibrant “Cultural Corridor” (Samayeenand Imon, 2017) of Dhaka. This gives us the opportunity to study the urban history of the zone as it was and as it is now.

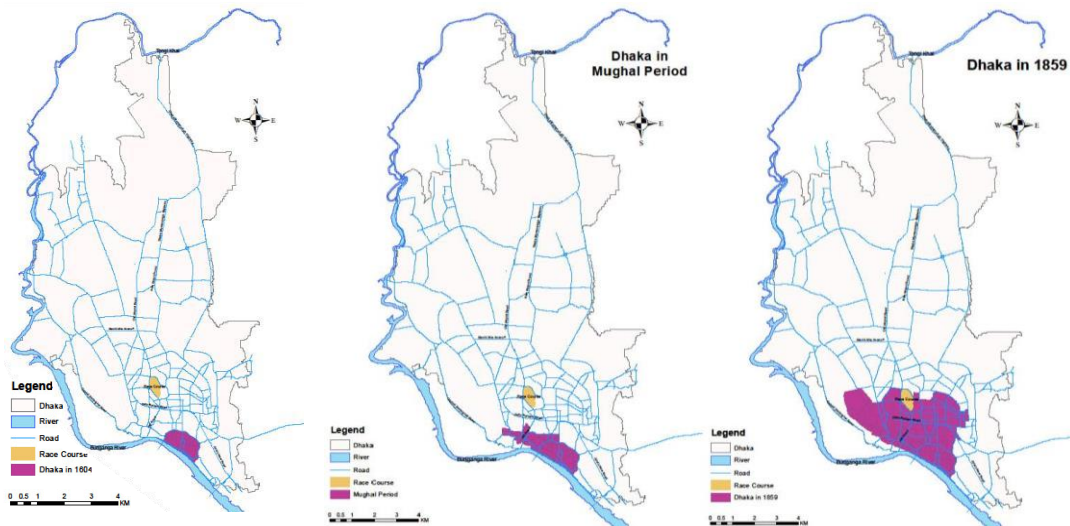


Figure 1. Area of Dhaka in different period shown in the DAP map with reference to Ramna racecourse (in yellow mark), Source: Modified by the author

Emphasizing on some representational buildings of various timeline, the study is particularly focused on understanding the prospect of heritage route in this zone with an analytical overview of both historic perspective and syntactic properties of the segmented urban form of Ramna.

Methodology

To find a prospective route for generating heritage walk while observing historical edifices in Ramna, the study has been conducted on the basis of extensive literature followed by Syntactic Analysis developed by Space Syntax Laboratory. Maps of the selected time period have been collected from secondary sources, followed by a detail land use survey and in depth observation to select the buildings from basic inventory of Ramna by understanding their historical significance. Later on the syntactic analysis has been carried on to find out a “Heritage Walk Route” by exploring various syntactic measures of the selected buildings’ frontal or approached road segment in past and present.

For the purpose of this research, six maps of Dhaka City of different time periods; pre-Mughal, Mughal, Map of 1859, Map of 1905-1911, Map of 1952 and Dhaka city map of 2007 have been studied to understand how the city shifted from the river to the land along with its shifting core from Babubazar to Ramna to more northwards. Axial maps of all those periods have enabled generating global and local integration maps and their integration values have been checked for error; there were no negative values found. From the table generated by the graph analysis, connectivity, intelligibility was plotted for different time periods.

Scope remains in further study of this built heritage by formulation of specific urban conservation policy for future development in the area. The limitation lies within the limited selection

of heritage buildings from the basic inventory of Ramna. There are also several measures in space syntax to judge (i.e. convex space, isovist space) the relation of the edifice with its surroundings. Only axial map, connectivity and integration have been analyzed. Scope remains also in the inclusion of every edifice for detail analysis of them and relate to the city context.

Urban Morphology, Conservation and Heritage Walk

Urban morphology is the study of the form of human settlements and the process of their formation and transformation. It emphasizes the importance of explaining and identifying structural elements and their development sequences therefore, it is very helpful in historic preservation research. (Whitehand et al., 2011). The principles of urban morphology are, firstly, urban form is defined by three fundamental physical elements: buildings and their related open spaces, plots or lots, and streets. Secondly, urban form can be understood at four levels of resolution corresponding to the building/lot, the street/block, the city, and the region. And finally, urban form can only be understood historically since the elements of which it is comprised undergo continuous transformation and replacement.

The contributions of urban morphology to the research of historical preservation are embodied in two perspectives. First, the premise for the study of urban morphology is based on the understanding that the basic quality of urban landscape is subject to historic changes. This understanding also forms the base of historical preservation practice today since the historical preservation and urban conservation always involves the varying physical and spatial context. Second, the methods urban morphology uses can be applied to the research of historical preservation. The specific implementation of morphological analysis to demonstrate the relationship between different elements of the built environment, for instance the relationship between plots and buildings can be an effective way to study the historical and modern urban fabrics. Concept of Urban Heritage and Built Environment Conservation is how the historical cities reflect different periods and planning ideas in both the overall town plan, public open spaces and the buildings. It is what the building, the historical area, the landscape has to tell us about the way people lived and thought in the past.

The CRUTA (Conservation and Research of Urban Traditional Architecture) Foundation invited the novel idea of Heritage walk in 1988 in North Kolkata, which renews the heritage of education, enlightenment, public service, and reform that the city traditionally stood for. Heritage walk, by putting a number of the heritage buildings into a tour serving the tourists can brought a positive change in the land use pattern of the area (Rahman and Nayak, 2008). The revenue earned through the walk may positively influence the area's economy.

History and Timeline of Ramna: A Brief Narrative

Ramna, the name, at present verbally and spatially directly linked to the green park which is in bengali named as “Ramna Uddyan” (Ramna Garden). But the historical Ramna was more than a garden. It began with the Mughals from 1608. Ramna was first developed as Mughal high officials' residential area. The prominent two localities are “Sujatpur” & “Chistia”. When Mughal rule was weakening, the ascent of the British rule reduced the status of the city to a mere district headquarter. During the Mughal time the Fort formed the administrative nucleus. It was turned into a jail by the British. The new administrative district grew up near the Victoria Park (Mamun, 2000, Islam, 1996).

The Europeans gradually moved from the riverside to the new residential area in Ramna (Fig. 2). The residential houses in Ramna had the best available contemporary living facilities. The architecture of these buildings of two types: one was built in pure Renaissance styles or European style and other was a hybrid style of Mughal and the colonials. After 1905, the centre of principal administration of the capital city was located in Ramna. The present Medical College Hospital housed the provincial Secretariat. Government administrative control was updated, forming two units located at Ramna and near Victoria Park.

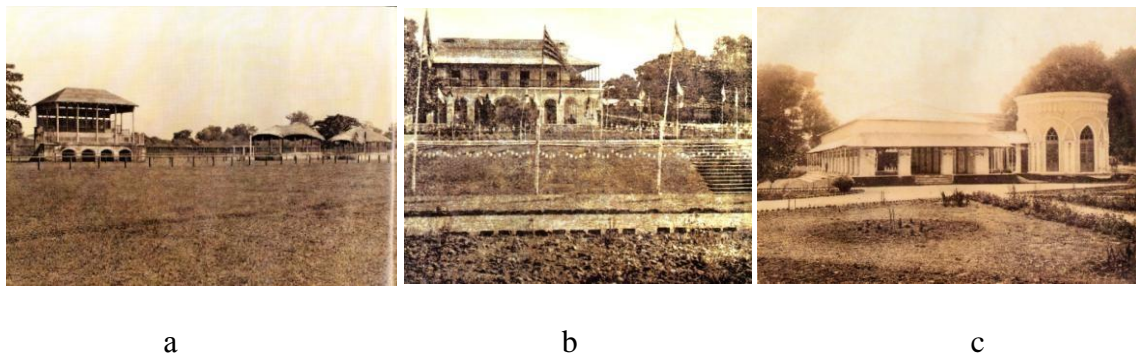


Figure 2. (a) Ramna Racecourse, (b) Ishrat Manjil, (c) Durbar Hall (Source: Sekaler Dhaka, Mamun, 2000)

The Civil Lines were not only the administrative centre but also the official residences of the administrative heads. Centre of educational institutions was also established in Ramna at this time. The Ahsanullah Engineering School was built around Ramna. Construction of Dhaka College began in 1904, Lord Curzon himself laid the foundation of it. The landscaping work of Ramna began in 1908 by R.L Proudlock, a staff of London's famous Kew garden who carefully chose the trees suitable for hot humid environment of Dhaka. He left in 1918 but his associates completed his incomplete work in 1928. Most of the buildings erected before the annulment of partition were handed over to Dhaka University when it was established in 1921. Majority of the colonial architecture that remains erect till this day are within the Ramna area lie in the custody of the Dhaka University authorities and the rest are the concern of the Public Works Department (PWD). This is one of the reasons that they are still standing. (Mamun, 2000).

Its spatial enclave was never clearly demarked (Forier et al., 2011-2012) and even at present, apart from the park, the locational significance is behold by manifesting the name onto some administrative building of that zone like; Ramna Thana. This study considered the historical Ramna manifested generally (shown in the map at Fig.3) and its significant edifices of various time line. When Ramna was in the building process; most of the buildings of this zone might be more integrated with its surroundings than now as the city perimeter was not too large and complex then. This paper attempts to find out how they were related to the city in past and what is the situation at present by analyzing the axial maps of different time periods.

Timeline of Ramna

The chronological events related to the built environment revamping around Ramna shows its significance as a continuous urban priority of various timeline. The following are the glimpses of some historical built environment alteration and initiation that taken place in this area:

1610	History of Ramna begins with the building of two residential areas for the high officials of the Mughals.
1679	Building of Hazi Shahbaz Mosque 17 th century Mosque of Musa Khan
1717	After shifting of capital from Rajmahal, Ramna became barren
1765	Nimtoli Dewri
1777	Greek memorial 18 th century Sikh temple
1825	Charles Dawes cleared the jungle of Ramna
1840	Development process continued with Moreland Skinner
1840	Construction of garden houses was led by Armenian landlord
1844	Nawab's garden house "Eshrat Manjil" was in the place of Dhaka university arts faculty building
1857	Sepahi mutiny and formal British rule in India
1859	In the map of Dhaka Ramna was shown in two parts: Ramna racecourse & Ramna Plains

1864	Municipality built a road for elephant from pilkhana to Ramna, which is now known as “elephant road”.
1870	Another rebuilding of Ramna occurred. 1885 Railway station in Phulbaria
1904	Construction of Dhaka College started.
1904	Lord Curzon laid the foundation stone of Curzon Hall 1905
	Partition of Bengal was announced
1905	Construction of Governor’s House, secretariat, Fazlul Haque hall
1908	Landscape Planning of Dhaka started by Quei garden with the super vision of R.L. Prondlock
1911	Annulment of partition of Bengal
1911	Construction of Bardhaman House, Chummery House
1917	Patrick Geddes offered an outlined for development of the old town area with colonial offices and residential buildings around Ramnagreen.
1921	Establishment of Dhaka University
1921	Different buildings built during partition of Bengal in Ramnawere handed over to Dhaka University
1929	Salimullah MuslimHall
1955	Art college
1962	PublicLibrary
1971	After independence. Ramna green was named “Shuhrawardi Uddan”.

(Source: Mamun, 2000)

Architectural Inventory of Ramna

The following architectural inventory has been compiled from various significant time period as representational buildings of Ramna. The study is intended to observe whether the scope of heritage route can be further elaborated, hence initial phase of investigation is limited within a small number of representational buildings from different historical time periods. The segmented map showing Ramna enclave (in black dotted line in Fig. 3) and its surrounding has been marked up with some important historic buildings of Mughal, Colonial and Modern era.

For the purpose of this study, the buildings highlighted in the list has been selected to observe if they fit in a heritage walk route as representing major edifices of various era. The buildings are marked with color code showing specific period (shown in Table. 1) and their location in map (Fig. 4). The analysis of axial maps are later associated with the location of these buildings into the urban fabric to understand whether the approach road to this structures are well integrated to propose a heritage walk for this glorious segment of Dhaka.

Table 1

Buildings of various periods with color coding selected for detail analysis (Source: Modified by the author)

Edifices	Color code	Time Line
Khaza Shahbaz Mosque& Khaza Shahbaz Tomb	●	Mughal period
Greek Mousoleum	●	Colonial period
Curzon Hall	●	
High Court	●	
Chummery House	●	
Bardhaman House	●	
Art College	●	Modern period
Dhaka University Library	●	
TSC (Teachers Students Center)	●	

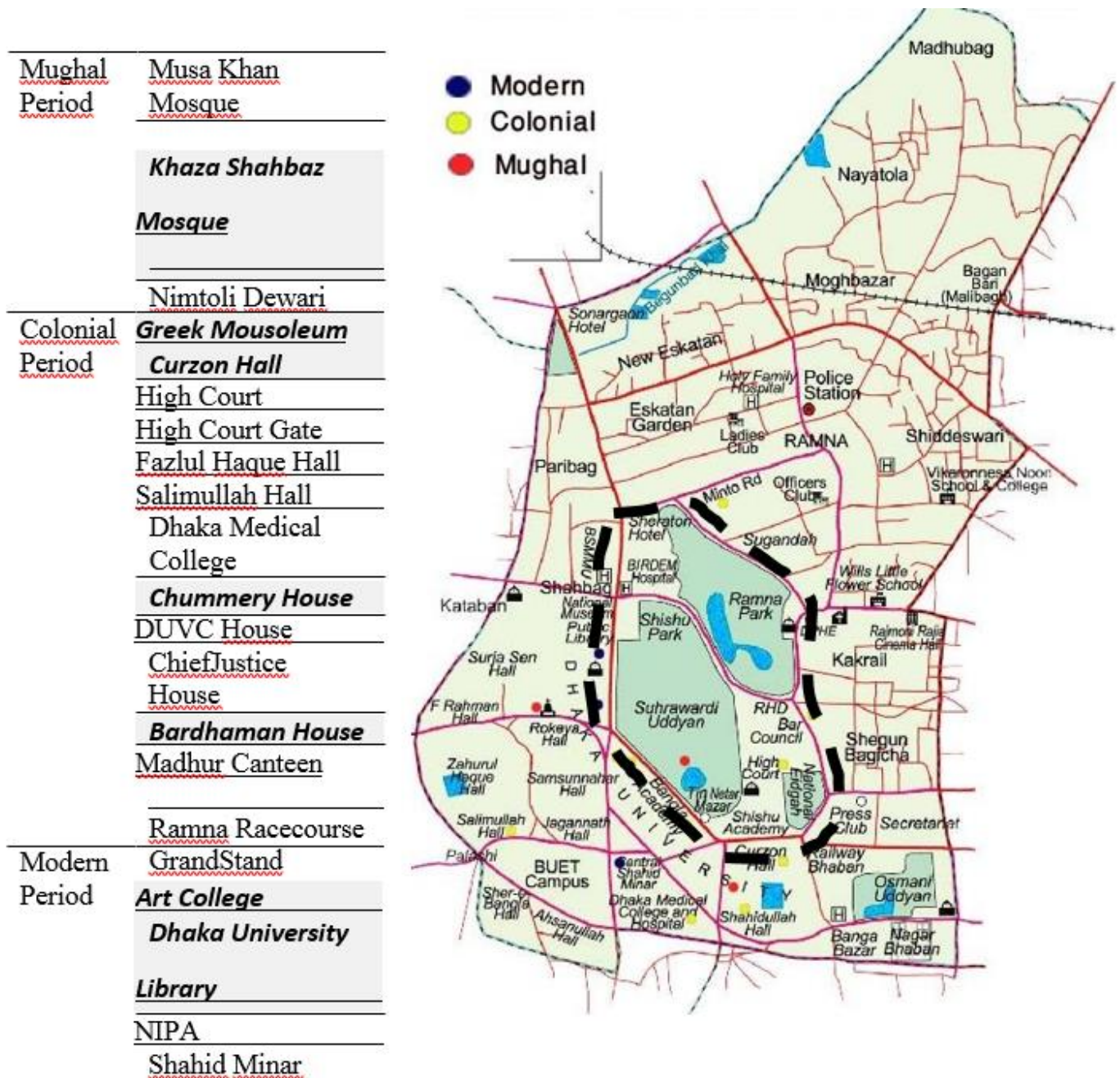


Figure. 3: Map showing Ramna Enclave & its surrounding
Source: Modified by the author

(Map extracted from Graphosman)

Syntactic Analysis of Ramna Area

Since morphological studies can help us to identify the present-day values of historical elements, they often act as an important analytical device for urban conservation practices (Liu, 2011). The quality of the descriptions and analysis for the historical urban patterns designate the quality of the plan decisions. Syntactic analysis of urban form developed by Space syntax laboratory is a widely used method. It helps to understand the spatial clues which have importance in planning decisions for urban conservation area and its around. Space syntax is a model

for representation, analysis, and interpretation of urban form regarding how towns work, and the relation between patterns of use and movement (Hillier et al.,1987).

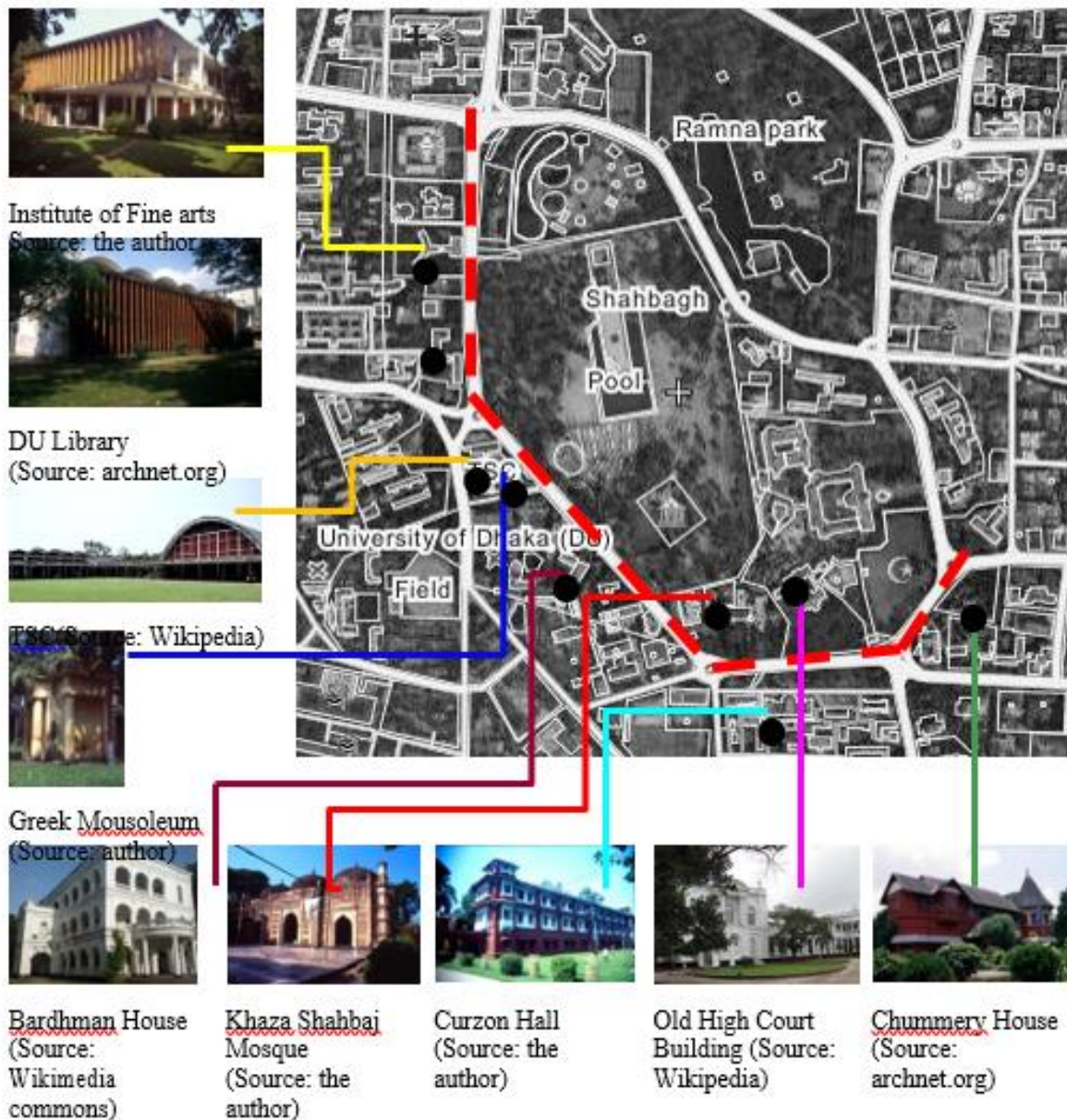


Figure 4. The location and image of selected edifices around Ramna

The Integration maps from various timeline of Dhaka city, show the most integrated roads in red to the least integrated ones in blue visible with the then existing urban integration core for both global and local conditions (Figure.5 to 10). The first order syntactic measures; Global (R_n) and Local integration (R_3) and Connectivity (CN) are followed by second order measures of “Intelligibility” ($R_n \wedge CN$) and “Interface of Potential” ($R_n \wedge R_3$) of the urban gridare compiled accordingly along with the timeline maps of Dhaka (Table.2).

Pre-Mughal era has no existence of Ramna as an area. But Mughal map of Dhaka first identified the area that pop up the name Ramna. As the city grows in a complex web, Ramna, till date holds the image of greenery and acts as “Urban Lung” of Dhaka.

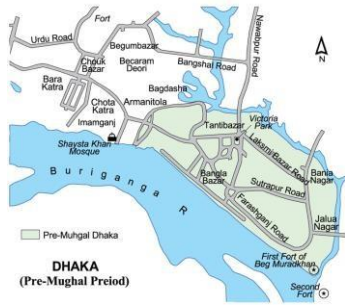


Fig. 5(a): Pre-Mughal Dhaka Source: <http://en.banglapedia.org/>



Fig. 5(b): Global Integration (Rn) of pre-Mughal Dhaka

Source: the author

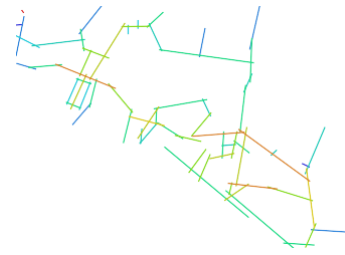


Fig. 5(c): Local Integration (R3) of pre-Mughal Dhaka



Fig. 6(a): Mughal Dhaka Source: <http://en.banglapedia.org/>



Fig.6(b): Global Integration (Rn) of Mughal Dhaka

Source: the author



Fig. 6(c): Local Integration (R3) of Mughal Dhaka



Fig. 7(a): Colonial Dhaka, 1859 Source: <http://en.banglapedia.org/>



Fig. 7(b): Global Integration (Rn) of Colonial Period (1859)

Source: the author



Fig. 7(c): Local Integration (R3) of Colonial Period (1859)

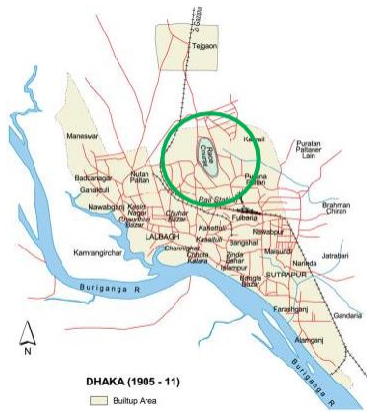


Fig. 8(a): Dhaka, 1905-1911
Source: <http://en.banglapedia.org/>



Fig. 8(b): Global Integration (R_n) of Dhaka in 1905-1911



Fig. 8(c): Local Integration (R_3) of Dhaka in 1905-1911

Source: The author

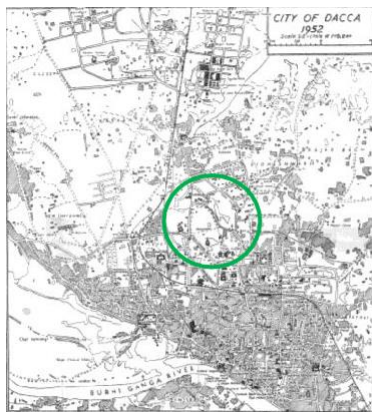


Fig. 9(a): Map of Dhaka, 1952
Source: collected by the author



Fig. 9(b): Global Integration (R_n) of Dhaka in 1952



Fig. 9(c): Local Integration (R_3) of Dhaka in 1952

Source: the author



Fig. 10(a): Dhaka, 2007
Source: the author



Fig. 10(b): Global Integration (R_n) of Dhaka in 2007

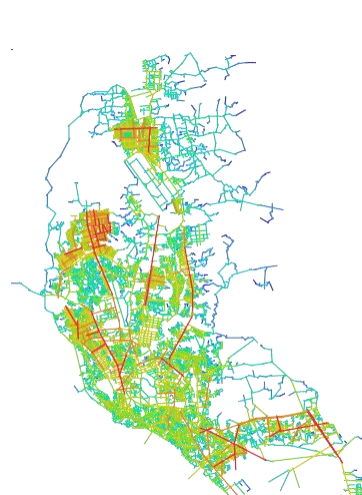


Fig. 10(c): Local Integration (R_3) of Dhaka in 2007

The comparative analysis of maps of various time periods (Table.2) shows that the maximum global integration (Rn) value gradually reduced with a very moderate differentiation from 0.869532 of pre-Mughal period to 0.837922 of 2007. Though the city expanded a lot after the pre-Mughal period and its complexity of spatial arrangements has increased the road networks with more connected segments, the overall character of intelligibility of the city has been reduced from 0.533224 of pre-Mughal period to 0.1842045 of 2007.

Table 2

Comparison of Integration values (Global-Rn and Local-R3), Connectivity (CN), Interface of Potential of Urban Grid (Rn^R3) and Intelligibility (Rn^CN) values of various time period of Dhaka City

Time Period		Rn	R3	CN	R of Rn^R3	Intelligibility R of Rn^CN
Pre-Mughal	Max	.869532	2.26085	7	0.779207	0.533224
	Min	.351765	.333333	1		
	Average	.651985	1.22033	2.48485		
Mughal	Max	.722528	2.12493	6	0.6805086	0.4709607
	Min	.320412	.333333	1		
	Average	.557642	1.25649	2.58621		
Dhaka in 1859	Max	.775545	2.37946	8	0.642909	0.4573423
	Min	.344398	.333333	1		
	Average	.591538	1.2971	2.625		
Dhaka in 1905	Max	.771755	2.43877	8	0.6169546	0.4276914
	Min	.345556	.333333	1		
	Average	.591164	1.32155	2.65294		
1952	Max	.78096	2.55362	9	0.5544438	0.3390648
	Min	.306188	.333333	1		
	Average	.541517	1.28156	2.60188		
2007*	Max	.837922	3.34391	43	0.4744797	0.1842045
	Min	.209755	.351994	1		
	Average	.539467	1.45619	3.12943		

*As for 2007 map, the local integration has been considered with R=4

The main integration core of the city has also been gradually shifted. But the Ramna zone in all cases remains to a closer contact to the city integration core though apparently the extended city size make it seem chaotic to identify. The buildings in and around Ramna are identified easily considering the local network.

In table.03, all 5 maps, excluding pre-Mughal Period (as the road network was in a too elementary level & no edifices were erected in that era) are combined according to time line to have a comparative understanding of the syntactic measures of the approach/ frontal road segments of the selected edifices of the Ramna area. Though all buildings were not erected at the same time; rather phase by phase, the existence of the road segments were apparently evident from the early phase of map, might be in a deformed lay out. Roads were reshaped, added time by time; hence the values for all road segments approaching the edifices are considered for analytical understanding of how the individual segments with their locations (both in local and global integration maps) can be significant and can form a define route that could be easily considered as a heritage spine. The approach road segments of various buildings are analysed in terms of their various syntactic measures in different time periods were mostly all of them show higher or nearer values of Rn & R3 in comparison to respective periods" average Rn and R3.

Table 3

Comparing all syntactic values for selected historic buildings in various time periods.

Time line of various maps	Syntactic Measures	Selected buildings in the Ramna Area (Along with Syntactic Measures of the approach/ Frontal road segment of the edifices in various time periods)									Average Rn & R3 for various period
		KhazaShahbaz Mosque & KhazaShahbaz Tomb	Greek Mousoleum	Curzon Hall	High Court	Chummary House	Bardhaman House	Art College	DhakaUniversity Library	TSC	
Mughal Dhaka	Rn	.615598	.660337	.664383	.653439	.601483	.615598	.544314	.568476	.660337	.557642
	R3	1.31797	1.41359	1.48036	1.19815	1.38734	1.31797	1.46661	1.17688	1.41359	1.25649
	CN	3	2	3	2	3	3	3	2	2	
	Rn^R3	0.6805086									
	Rn^CN	0.4709607									
1859	Rn	.647186	.612899	.687223	.66479	.610984	.647186	.565889	.593548	.612899	.591538
	R3	1.31797	1.13657	1.55172	1.32722	1.23882	1.31797	1.34439	1.09529	1.13657	1.2971
	CN	3	2	3	2	2	3	2	2	2	
	Rn^R3	0.642909									
	Rn^CN	0.457342									
1905	Rn	.648214	.613728	.689431	.667625	.613918	.648214	.568371	.595493	.613728	.591164
	R3	1.31797	1.13657	1.55172	1.32722	1.23882	1.31797	1.34439	1.09529	1.13657	1.32155
	CN	3	2	3	2	2	3	2	2	2	
	Rn^R3	0.6169546									
	Rn^CN	0.4276914									
1952	Rn	.727196	.698941	.715815	.715815	.67982	.727196	.774209	.774209	.698941	.541517
	R3	1.42553	1.50724	1.52269	1.52269	1.56883	1.42553	2.25422	2.25422	1.50724	1.28718
	CN	3	3	3	3	4	3	6	6	3	
	Rn^R3	0.5544438									
	Rn^CN	0.3390648									
2007	Rn	.675075	.690074	.665882	.665882	.725272	.675075	.724404	.724404	.690074	.539467
	R4	1.2938	1.25483	1.45307	1.45307	2.65904	1.2938	1.66484	1.66484	1.25483	1.45619
	CN	3	3	4	4	14	3	5	5	3	
	Rn^R4	0.4744797									
	Rn^CN	0.1842045									

It is noticeable that the values are changing for the road segments individually as well as for the whole urban system in a gradual manner of time mostly to higher ones. The global integration values with the specific building segments' value might differ considerably, but those roads are more locally integrated and it helps to consider the understand the future prospects of a heritage route along the selected historical buildings.

But the value reduction of intelligibility in macro level doesn't show that the selected heritage buildings of the specific zone have become less identifiable. Rather the increased values of local integration are showing strong possibilities of connecting the heritage buildings within a heritage walk. The maximum local integration (R3) of the same maps of pre-Mughal (2.26085) has been increased to a value of 3.34391 in 2007. Even the road (Segment No.2398) in recent map (2007) showing highest global integration value (Rn-max) of 0.837922 is also nearer to Ramna zone and in selected area, four roads share two historic buildings each (2407, 2608, 2421 and 2408) thus making the rationality of an effective heritage route within this premise.

From the Table. 4, it is evident that, the current integration values of specific segments approaching selected buildings are higher than the average Rn (0.539467). Same is applicable to local integration. Even the identified segments are interconnected from one to any other with a highest turning of four steps. And most buildings are one step away from others. The axial map

of 2007 (Fig: 11) shows the approximate location of the buildings with reference to the main integration core of the city.

Table 4

Comparing the integration value of specific segment with over all
Global Integration and Local Integration of 2007 map.

Buildings Syntactic measure	KhazaShahbaz Mosque &KhazaShahbaz Tomb	Greek Mousoleum	Curzon Hall	High Court	Chummary House	Bardhaman House	Art College	Dhaka University Library	TSC
Segment No.	2407	2608	2421	2421	2415	2407	2408	2408	2608
Global Integration (Rn) of 2007	0.675075	0.690074	0.665882	0.665882	0.725272	0.675075	0.724404	0.724404	0.690074
Run (max)- 0.837922 (Segment no. 2398) Rn (Average)- 0.539467									
Local Integration (R4) Of 2007	1.2938	1.25483	1.45307	1.45307	2.65904	1.2938	1.66484	1.66484	1.25483
R4 (max)- 3.34391 (Segment no. 1125) R4 (Average)- 1.45619									

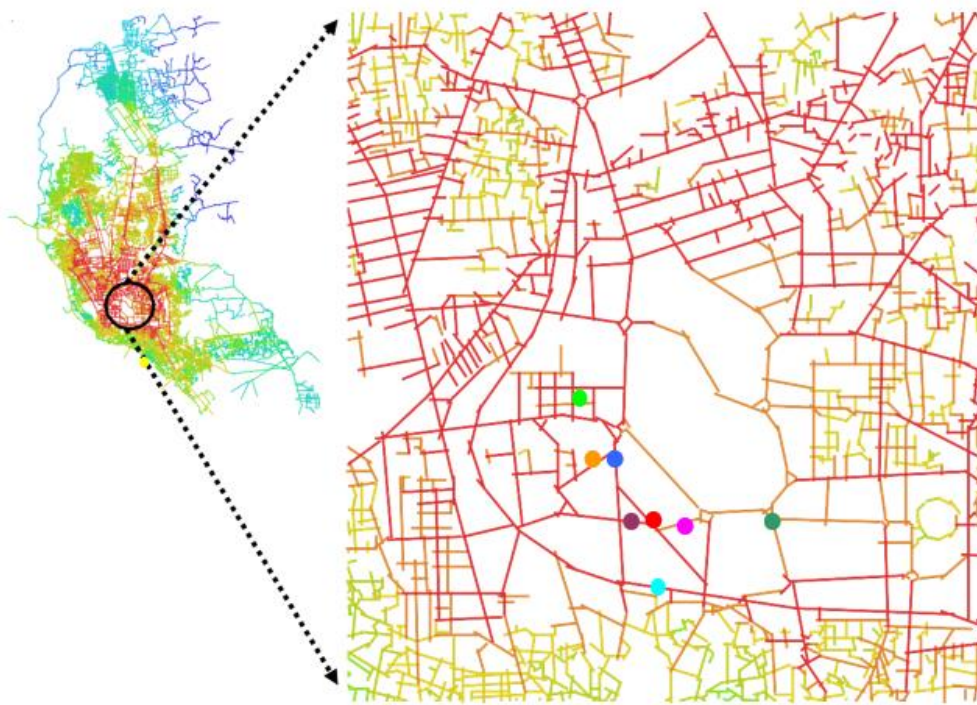


Figure 11. Selected heritage structures located in axial map of 2007
(Source: Modified by the author)

Conclusion

The case for conservation of building and surroundings of colonial Ramna has become an important issue as it is showcasing a unique built environment various historical timeline in Dhaka. Heritage walk can be an efficient tool and based on our analysis of the historical buildings of Ramna of various periods, as well as the syntactic analysis of the regenerated axial maps, we can state the scope of a significant heritage walk is evident within the area.

The area Ramna witnessed a rigorous urban place making process around it. From Mughal historic buildings to contemporary architectural intervention has retained the multifaceted vibe of this area. According to Forier et al. (2011-2012), “It is hard to say what characterizes Ramna area but when walking around in this neighbourhood one can somehow ‘feel’ the difference with the rest of the city”.

Good planning starts with what the existing resources are; material resources, economic resources, human or cultural resources. When we have a clear concept of what we have then we can decide what to do with them. In this light, urban heritage is the starting point for sustainable planning and development process. Once delightful, Dhaka is now one of the fastest growing mega cities of the world. The consequence of this rapid, unplanned urbanization has been the destruction of the reminiscences of the past to make way for new development. Urbanization is not a problem as long as we include preservation of the urban environment of ordinary town dwellers in the cultural heritage program and conservation policy justifying the unique historic environments on its merit. By studying the changes of town plan, building fabric and land use and relating them to the historic events and policies along with change of time, it is possible to identify the place of conservation and determine suitable functional land and building use around them, thus initiating the foundation for future planning work.

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